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Pre-Roll Takes a Terrible Toll

Why Are You Applying Pre-Internet Tech to Web Video?

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But first, a word from our sponsors...

No one would dispute that video is changing the online advertising landscape. But in its present commercial incarnation, where pre-roll ads often are unrelated to the content they precede, online video ads are more a confusing step backwards than a purposeful step forward.

Pre-roll technology takes us straight back to the days before TiVo and digital video recorders by forcing viewers to endure the entire ad before allowing access to the programming they requested. True, you might get someone to watch your ad, but that's about all there is to it. This dubious distinction notwithstanding, the list of pluses is much shorter than the list of minuses. To wit:

- Why would anybody want to watch a commercial online that they literally pay to avoid offline? — *"Where's the clicker?"*
- Why promote a technology that fails to satisfy our on-demand appetite? — *"Give me the clicker."*
- How does this help your brand? Perhaps more importantly, how might it hurt it? — *"I am so sick of this commercial."*
- Why promote a technology that stops progress dead in its tracks? — *"Hit the fast-forward."*

What Can Be Done

Why indeed would anybody want to watch a commercial online that they literally pay to avoid offline? The answer is, they wouldn't ... and they don't. Pre-roll attrition rates are staggering, and you can't make friends and influence people if the first thing you do is piss them off by trying to force the round peg of one medium into the square hole of another.

Forced intrusion flies in the very face of our on-demand world and the seamless user experience—a trillion-

dollar industry and infrastructure investment. Its failure on a performance level is virtually preordained by its utter failure on a conceptual level.

And what about your brand? How are you helping yourself by alienating your audience on so many proven levels? It's like the scene in Woody Allen's *Take the Money and Run* where the bank-holdup crew is assembled to watch a run-through of their planned heist. The projector is switched on, presumably to show the layout of the bank, and *Sport Fishing in Canada!* appears on the screen instead. One would-be robber turns to another and remarks: "There's always a boring short."

Perhaps the biggest failure of the pre-roll approach is the way in which it denies both advertisers and consumers of the Web's—and their own—true on-demand potential. What's more, it defies measurement by imposing conditions on advertisers and media buyers that reinforce outdated metrics. For the first time in history we can anticipate and measure consumer engagement. So how do we deal with this unprecedented branding advantage? We paint ourselves into an even smaller cost-per-thousand driven corner from which we can't escape. Or can we?

The first thing we have to do is to hold ourselves more accountable. The only way to do that is to challenge the status quo with a new paradigm replete with its own new vernacular. It makes no sense to simply count clickthroughs when it's now possible to measure the true width and breadth of consumer engagement.

The key is in approaching the opportunity from the inside out—all the while asserting the premise that it's programs between commercials rather than commercials between programs that drives consumer media. This fundamental cause and effect is exactly what pioneers of the golden ages of radio and television understood, and what we have forsaken in our rush to fill the bandwidth.

Pre-roll advertising leaves us only one point of control—the right to say "No". Wouldn't we be better off engaging consumers in a way that encouraged them to say "Yes"? Of course we would, and the good news is there actually are new media models that produce this elusive "welcome intrusion". By fusing the mass appeal of online video with the proven power and legitimacy of advertiser friendly video content, it's possible to transform consumers into willing accomplices eager to spend time within the exclusive confines of your branded surroundings.

Forget cost-per-click and start thinking VPE, value-per-engagement.

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